

Crime prevention - Now for the hard questions?

Wilson, Paul; Lincoln, RA

Published in:

Proceedings of the Sixteenth Biennial Conference of the Australian Crime Prevention Council Council

Licence:

CC BY-NC-ND

[Link to output in Bond University research repository.](#)

Recommended citation(APA):

Wilson, P., & Lincoln, RA. (1993). Crime prevention - Now for the hard questions? In *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Biennial Conference of the Australian Crime Prevention Council Council: Chaos or Reason. Community safety in the twenty-first century* (pp. 94-99). Australian Crime Prevention Council.
<http://www.acro.com.au/Reports/Chaos%20or%20Reason%20Conference%20Brisbane%201993.pdf>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

For more information, or if you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact the Bond University research repository coordinator.

CRIME PREVENTION - NOW FOR THE HARD QUESTIONS?

Paul Wilson, Dean of Humanities and Social Science, Bond University, Queensland and
Robyn Lincoln, Doctoral Scholar, Queensland University of Technology

Many years ago I addressed the Australian Crime Prevention Council and basically accused them of being a well-meaning body of men and women but one whose conceptual and theoretical understandings of what was involved in crime prevention were naive in the extreme. Since that talk it has been a long time between invitations to speak to this august body and I suspect that after this talk, it will be even longer before I am invited back again. In the intervening years I have been involved - before, during and after my time at the Australian Institute of Criminology - in many crime prevention projects. These included the only overall evaluation of crime prevention approaches yet published in this country (with Ivan Potas and Adrian Vining). It is heartening to see such an upsurge in crime prevention generated by the Council, governments, business and academia. However, we still maintain that there are some very real difficulties in how the term is used, implemented and conceptualised.

In our examination of the current situation of crime prevention in this country, we have elected to focus on juvenile justice policies and programs for most of the more comprehensive and recent work has been done in this area. But we need to begin by asking some basic questions: who comprises the group we call "youth", do we take a justice or a welfare approach to their situation, and are they predominantly victims or offenders? In addition we need to examine the broader questions: how do changes in public attitudes (like victims rights and law and order lobbies) affect youth policies, and how does fiscal constraint and political expediency alter the policy directions? This paper explores these questions and then examines recent juvenile justice developments in Western Australia and Queensland. It critically analyses the schemes in these States to arrive at the view that the justice and welfare models are not additive and that is therefore time to take a new approach - namely a social development model to crime prevention.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF YOUTH

As is the case for other social institutions (health, welfare, education, etc), the criminal justice system focuses on young people as a distinct group by providing separate and specific services, legislation, agencies and programs. The result is that youth are identified by an age category (albeit a significant social indicator in Australian society), which often fails to take into account other social variables like class, race, location, interests and so on. While some programs attempt to recognise the heterogeneity of young people by focusing on particular categories (like Aborigines, unemployed, rural, etc) this targeting by age or by specific sub-group leads to serious negative consequences in the criminal justice arena. It is important to emphasise that while a youth culture (or cultures) exists, it is not homogeneous and is significantly affected by social variables such as geographic location and socio-economic factors. So how do we conceptualise young people in Australian society?

Conflict conceptualisations are evident in the six approaches, identified by Drury and Jamrozik (1985) that underlie policy for young people. These are:

1. Young people are a distinct social group with common interests who require specific policy and service options.
2. Young people are in transition from children to adults and remedial policies aid this process toward adulthood.
3. Young people have multiple problems and so services and policies are designed to overcome personal deficits.
4. Young people are victims and remedial programs aim to address this disadvantage.
5. Young people are a threat to society and this encourages the need for greater social control mechanisms.
6. Young people are social change agents benefiting from programs aimed at encouraging their participation in community and society.

These six approaches have been applied at various time and in various ways and some operate simultaneously resulting in confusion in both public and government attitudes towards young people. On the one hand, young people are treated with paternalism as victims who have serious problems, at the other extreme, they are subject to punitive treatment in an attempt to maintain social order. Such conflict results in overall confusion in policy and in the services and programs offered to young people because of the very different theoretical and conceptual bases which underlie them.

Of these six approaches, the first (having common interests) demonstrated our inability to conceptualise young people as being a diverse group with varying needs. The second, third and fourth approaches (in transition, have multiple problems and being victims) reveal our tendency towards a welfare model for youth. The fifth approach (as threats) clearly shows a

justice perspective. It is the final model (as a conduit for social change), though rarely applied, which points the way to the social development model needed if we are to make our juvenile justice system more successful than it has been in the past.

It is clear that a major conflict exists between a commitment to the welfare of younger people versus a commitment to community stability and the maintenance of "law and order". In addition, the more recent orientation in criminal justice policy to focus on the rights of victims has resulted in a further blurring of the thrust of juvenile justice policies and attitudes towards young people generally. As the previous categorisations show, young people are viewed, sometimes simultaneously, as disadvantaged victims and as out-of-control perpetrators. In a period when victim rights are in the ascendancy, young people are increasingly categorised more exclusively in the perpetrator group. Yet people, especially young people, are not exclusively "violated victims" nor "violating offenders" (Sandor, 1993, p. 104).

Most data on reported crime show young people, especially young males, are the group in Australian society most likely to be over-represented as both offenders and victims (Sandor, 1993). They should not be placed into mutually exclusive categories with arbitrary boundaries. Indeed, young people are victimised within the juvenile justice system, where for Aboriginal youth for example, violence is a routine part of interaction with the police (see Cunneen, 1993). And as Sandor (1993, p. 104) suggests "it is distinctly offensive when an appeal to the victim's lobby is used as a cloak for punitive measures or a short-cut on the just treatment of suspected offenders". He says that "the rise of a victim-focused discourse is paralleled by a corresponding intolerance for the foibles of young offenders" (Sandor, 1993, p. 105).

Within the more recent, although ever-present, push for "law and order" arises a further contradiction in the categorisation of young people resulting in more punitive measures. This is the widespread belief that crimes by young people are increasing and many new programs are based on this mistaken assumption. Yet the data shows that the view of juvenile offending as being out-of-control is erroneous. The Criminal Justice Commission in Queensland (1992, p. 46) found that while there has been an increased involvement by juveniles in crime in the last 30 years "since 1989-90 juvenile involvement in cleared crime appears to have declined". And in Victoria, the Children's Court figures show that there has been little change in "crime against the person or property" but it is offences against "good order" that have increased dramatically (Sandor, 1993, p. 105). This "law and order" push further confuses the categorisation of youth and the policies and programs that result.

At the same time as there has been a greater emphasis on viewing youth as a threat to society, there has also been a general concession by governments and policy-makers that traditional forms of juvenile justice are far from satisfactory. As Braithwaite (1992, p. 2) says "the Western criminal justice system is an abject failure" and criminal justice authorities are now recognising this in light of economic rationalist perspectives which force them to review the ever-increasing cost of justice programs. Governments have now embraced crime prevention initiatives in a bid to halt escalating costs and to keep young people out of the criminogenic environment of custodial settings. The "overall has been towards community-based correctional, educational, and re-socialisation programs rather than overt punishment" in most instances (Graycar and Jamrozik, (1993, p. 271).

In light of the increasing number of jobless youth, there has been a further move toward education and employment programs as measures of social control in the belief that dropping out of school is positively correlated with higher rates of juvenile crime. But the view that hoards of youths who are not in jobs or in school will create huge crime waves is contradicted by sufficient evidence that shows that the correlates of crime are much more complex (see Jajoura, (1993). Nevertheless, "by the year 2000, 95% of 20 year olds will be in education or training" (Graycar and Jamrozik, 1993, p. 259). Yet most of these programs are remedial and stem from "political expediency" (Graycar and Jamrozik, 1993, p. 270) rather than any inherent efficacy in thwarting juvenile offending or in offering greater opportunities for young people. However, they do herald a resurgence of the welfare approach toward youth problems.

CRIME PREVENTION SCHEMES

Given this confusion of attitudes towards young people and the recent moves in seemingly opposing directions towards justice and welfare models, it is instructive to examine two particular instances which exemplify both models. In most Australian States the justice and welfare models have managed to operate simultaneously. Juvenile correctional centres are decreasing in number and frequency of use and the shift is towards community based programs which offer supervision, community work, restitution activities, weekend camps and so on.

Even when residential centres are still operating, they have attempted to utilise current theories and take a soft approach. However, some research indicates that there are no differences in recidivism between the gentler institutional settings and more punitive "boot-camp-style" ones (Greenwood and Turner, (1993). These "soft programs" are seen as progressive re-socialisation models and could be classed as welfare approaches. By and large however, the changes in juvenile justice in recent years have been largely cosmetic in that they still operate within the paradigm of young people as victims of offenders rather than as potential social change agents. And they still operate by targeting individuals rather than by

developing communities (which is our suggested ecological approach).

Western Australia

In Western Australia juvenile justice as exemplified by the Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act 1992 is based on a justice model. It represents the "youth as threats to society" perspective given above. By and large, juvenile justice in WA is held up as the epitome of a "law and order" approach to crime. It is suggested that "police policy towards juveniles (is) shaped by a process of stereotyping groups of juveniles", where "police are likely to stereotype 'violent' groups on the basis that their disorderly behaviour cannot be safely predicted" (Beresford, 1993, p. 9). The public image of juvenile justice in WA is one where police exercise discretionary powers to a greater extent than elsewhere; where the policing methods are characterised by high-speed car chases of juvenile offenders and beatings seen as acceptable in police cells.

Western Australia has the highest police to citizen ratio in the country. The Parliamentary Select Committee on Youth Affairs (1992) stated that there were 94.6 police contacts per 1,000 juveniles compared to 38.8 for the nation as a whole. Over-policing to the level of harassment is evident, such as the practice of "name-checking". Harassment is also at a more serious level where "there is a widespread perception among youth workers to entrenched police brutality towards some young people" especially socio-economically disadvantaged youth, repeat offenders and Aboriginal youth (Beresford, 1993, p. 10).

The methods adopted are also more punitive so that more young people are arrested rather than summonsed (74% versus 24%) and dealt with by the Children's Court rather than the Children's Panel (Beresford, 1993). Detention rates are also high as judged by the evidence that only "12-15% of youth detained in maximum security remand actually received maximum security recommendations" (Beresford, 1993, p. 11).

Beresford (1993) characterises the WA juvenile justice system as being one where over-policing and harassment pervade; where more punitive methods are used widely; and where there is targeting of socio-economically disadvantaged youth. This "law and order" approach has not shown any positive effects in terms of reducing rates of juvenile crime, severity of crimes nor recidivism levels. Indeed the result is that juveniles are twice as likely to come into contact with police and receive severe mandatory sentences (Beresford, 1993). While some worthwhile community crime prevention schemes do operate in the State, they are overshadowed by this justice model approach.

Queensland

More recent changes in Queensland take the perspective of "youth as disadvantage", "youth as threat to society" and begin to extend to "youth as social change agents". The Juvenile Justice Act 1992 also endorses a justice model by including the use of cautions, the establishment of a Children's Court and greater sentencing options for young people. However, it is part of a broader package of measures aimed at softening the approach to crime by its non-statutory element, the newly-conceived Youth and Community Combined Action - and it is this link which provides the welfare model approach.

YACCA is based on an ecological or community development approach where 20 "high-crime" areas have been targeted across the State. Reference groups, comprising police, welfare, church and other local leaders, are in the process of being informed in each area and youth workers provide the link with other agencies. It involves the provision of school lecture programs, youth forums, camps, recreation activities and skills training programs (Hil and Seaton, 1993). Also, there are included provisions for Aboriginal and Islander people where elders can be involved in cautioning and avenues for Aboriginal communities to be involved in reparation schemes (Imlah, 1992, p. 9).

The Queensland scheme appears to address contemporary theories based on research evidences as a model of juvenile crime prevention. It adopts many features of the Bonnemaison scheme with the emphasis on improving jobs, better education and training and increasing recreational activities. It is able, in theory at least, to be responsive to community needs and demands as there is not overall blueprint of how the local YACCA programs should develop. There also exists an evaluation model to provide feedback to the program.

However, it is open to criticism as good rhetoric or window dressing. The scheme is based largely on justice and welfare models that confuse the attitude toward young people and result in individualistically applied programs. For while the YACCA programs are targeted at agencies, they do lead to marginalisation of youth into "disadvantaged" or "at risk" groups. Changes planned for the future in some areas that are already up and running, may broaden the scheme. It is hoped in these areas that mainstream groups (such as Scouts, youth clubs, sport clubs) will also be involved in YACCA to take away the stigma attached to it.

Furthermore, the scheme does not have strong bi-partisan political support - a feature of the Bonnemaison scheme on which it is based. It also assumes that juvenile crime is increasing, which is not supported by the data (Criminal Justice Commission, 1992) and by an understanding of changes in methods of police reporting. It inadvertently targets "at risk"

groups with the inherent dangers evidenced in Western Australia of increasing levels of net-widening and harassment. Because it takes a community approach, there are possible consequences of targeting and criminalising entire communities which creates a “panopticon” for the high-crime areas selected (see Sackett, 1993). Finally, there has been a lack of consultation and public debate on the scheme and its introduction. While training is to be done at the community level with local involvement, there is not widespread community support for the scheme and on this, it will surely falter.

Conclusion

It is clear that the justice and welfare models have failed individually and can no longer co-exist, that is, they are not additive. Those characteristics that indicate that juveniles require welfare assistance are the very ones that often bring them to the attention of police. This paradox has been supported by some substantial research evidence (see Gale et al 1990; James and Polk, 1989).

We also need to avoid targeting communities which are characterised as “problematic”. Many new crime prevention initiatives have been based in areas with high crime rates and where the relations with police and local juveniles are poor (see James and Polk, 1989). This would seem to be an obvious rationalisation where resources are limited. However, this form of reactive view - focusing on areas where trouble is expected - results in the “panopticon” adopted by Sackett (1993) to describe the situation of contemporary Aboriginal communities. Police and welfare agents are then stigmatising entire communities on the basis of crime rates. Community crime prevention should be more than a facilitator for the public to take their own protective measures; more than having the public act as social control agents; more than the public being de facto police. It should involve the development and integration of communities to avoid crime before it commences. It should be proactive rather than reactive.

Both the justice and welfare models have little to offer in the 1990s. They may work for “employed young people from middle class nuclear households” (Jackomon, 1992, p. 65) but not for the many who are not. We need to move from the individualistic approach that targets young people and “at risk” groups as problems, threats to society or disadvantaged to one which “accentuates the positive and creative citizenship of all young people. This shift necessitates institutional changes and not behavioural management” (Coventry, Muncie and Walter, 1993, p. 21 in Hil and Seaton, 1993). The justice and welfare models should be replaced by “social development” approaches (Hil and Seaton, 1993).

It is time to move from highlighting (and stigmatising) “at risk” groups toward a genuine concern with community development and an injection of resources into communities. We need to address or return to the cultural theorists (eg. Cloward and Ohlin and the Chicago School) to provide strongly bonded communities and not just work on an individual model of crime prevention.

We see such a “social development” model as taking up the sixth approach given at the beginning of this paper - one where young people are viewed as social change agents who should be encouraged to participate in their communities. What a social development model does not embrace is:

- the targeting and stigmatising of individuals and/or groups;
- the saturation of communities with further control measures which result in a panopticon of guards watching the guards watching the guarded; and
- making the police the central pivot around which crime prevention programs operate.

What a social development model does is to:

- target communities as the object to be improved rather than individuals;
- initiate programs that will ignite communities to use their own resources and personnel to improve social and economic conditions; and
- see crime prevention as integrally tied to improving the community as a whole and not as an “add on” focussed only on criminal behaviour.

While there is much to be applauded in the recent moves in community crime prevention, especially in Queensland, there is still room for severe criticism. We need to be clear about our conceptualisation of youth; we must recognise that the justice and welfare models conflict; and we should be defining what we mean by community crime prevention. Until we have seriously addressed these issues we are naive to expect our new initiatives to be successful.

And Now for the Hard Question!

1. As we have argued youth crime has been approached from a justice and/or welfare perspective. Often these perspectives conflict and are counterproductive both for the young people and for crime prevention. Are we willing to untangle this conceptual mess?
2. It is clear that the criminal justice system, and especially the juvenile justice system, is a theoretical and policy disaster area. There is little evidence from anywhere that it deters juveniles from committing crimes, protects the community or somehow rehabilitates young people. Isn't it time for politicians and policy-makers to forget their political agendas and try some radically new approaches?
3. This conference is full of well-meaning academics and practitioners, most of who are espousing the values of crime prevention and condemning a heavy-handed approach to preventing juvenile crime by the police and other criminal justice agencies. Yet, we would argue that there is not a shred of systematic and consistent hard evidence to indicate that current crime prevention strategies in Australia, and elsewhere, actually achieve the goals that are espoused for them. Why are we unwilling to undertake comprehensive evaluations of large-scale government programs when clearly such evaluations should go hand-in-hand with the implementation of these programs?
4. The voluntary groups and private organisations are often loud in their condemnation of police control of crime prevention programs and draconian punishment tariffs for offenders. Yet there is little evaluation of the alternative programs that they suggest, there is an unwillingness to critically assess their own role as quasi-state agents, and few have moved towards a social development approach to crime prevention. Why this criticism of others but not of themselves?
5. Lest it be thought that we are advocating a return to police dominance, let us be clear that, with some exceptions, we are highly critical of the police conceptualisation of crime prevention. The police generally equate crime prevention with neighbourhood watch, safety audits (the new buzz word) and a range of "dob-in" programs such as Operation Noah (for drugs) and Operation Paradox (for child molesters), and countless other schemes where citizens are encouraged to spy on each other. We would argue that there is no evidence to suggest that these dob-in programs have markedly affected illegal drug use, the rate of child molestation nor the tendency of juveniles to commit offences. When will the police recognise that crime prevention goes well beyond actions that they can control generally, and dobbing-in schemes specifically?

REFERENCES

- Beresford, Q. (1993) "Police Practices and Juvenile Crime: The Case of Western Australia" Criminology Australia, April/May, 8-13.
- Braithwaite, J. (1992) "Los Angeles and the Pathologies of Criminal Justice" Criminology Australia, April/May, 2-5.
- Criminal Justice Commission (1992) Youth, Crime and Justice in Queensland Brisbane: Criminal Justice Commission.
- Cunneen, C. (1991) "Aboriginal Young People and Police Violence" Aboriginal Law Bulletin, 2(49), 6-9.
- Drury, S. and Jamrozik, A. (1985) "Conceptual Issues of Relevance to Social Police and Services for Young People" in A. Jamrozik (ed) Issues in Social Welfare Police 1985: Perceptions, Concepts and Practice, Kensington: UNSW SWRC Reports and Proceedings No. 54, 7-37.
- Graycar, A. And Jamrozik, A. (1993) How Australians Live: Social Policy in Theory and Practice 2nd Edition, Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Greenwood, P.W. and Turner, S. (1993) "Evaluation of the Paint Creek Youth Centre. A Residential Program for Serious Delinquents" Criminology, 31(2), 263-80.
- Hil, R. and Swaton, S. (1993) "Policy or Orthodoxy? Queensland's Response to Juvenile Crime" Criminology Australia, April/May, 14-16.
- Imlah, C. (1992) Murri Young People and Queensland's Justice System Transitions, February, 6-10.
- Jajoura, G.R. (1993) "Does Dropping out of School Enhance Delinquent Involvement? Results from a Large-Scale National Probability Sample" Criminology, 31(2), 149-72.
- James, S. and Polk, K. (1989) "Policing Youth: Themes and Directions" in D. Chappell and P. Wilson (eds), Australian Policing: Contemporary Issues, Sydney: Butterworths.
- Parliamentary Select Committee on Youth Affairs (1992) Final Report Perth: Legislative Assembly.
- Sackett, L. (1993) "A Post-modern Panopticon" Australian Journal of Social Issues, 28(3), 228-43.
- Sandor, D. (1993) "The Thickening Blue Wedge" Alternative Law Journal, 18(3), 104-08.